2: Lambert G-5 (ca. 1935-1955) 1956
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I

THE TRIBES OF THE UNIT

631 THE area of the Kikuyu Land Unit is defined by the Native Lands Trust Ordinance of 1938, and comprises the five administrative districts of Fort Hall, Nyeri, Kiambu, Meru and Embu. Its total African population in 1948 was 1,259,830. They fall into the four main tribal groups, speaking closely related languages, *cf* Kikuyu, Meru, Chuka, and Embu. Each of these is further sub-divided into named territorial sections, the inhabitants of which are politically autonomous; these will be referred to as sub-tribes. The KIKUYU proper fall into three sub-tribes, *Metumo* in Fort Hall, *Kerugo* in Kiambu and *Gaki* in Nyeri; closely related sub-tribes are the *Gichugu* and *Ndia* of Embu District. The EMBU themselves are divided into *Embu* and *Mbere*. The Meru and Chuka are both included in Meru District. The MERU proper are divided into *Imenti*, *Tigania* and *Igembe*. The *Igoji* and *Muimbi* sub-tribes are closely related to the Meru. Of the other sub-tribes of this district the *Miutini* and *Mwimbi* have affinities with both Meru and Chuka, as do the *Tharaka*, some of whom live in the Kamba Land Unit.

• 105 These peoples have in common certain general principles of social structure. Descent is patrilineal and marriage is general patrilocal. Political organization rests on the grouping of the male population according to age. Age-sets are formed at the time of their initiation into manhood; successive sets are combined into larger units to which I give the name of regiment, and these

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again are grouped in generations. In Meru the women too are grouped in age-sets. This grouping is anticipated by the naming of groups of age-mates while they are still too young for initiation. Individuals, male or female, can be described at every period of life by terms denoting age and the attainment of the status held to be appropriate to any given age.

Territorial organization is based on the joint rights of an extended family (Kikuyu *mbari*) in an area of land (Kikuyu *githaka*) over which its homesteads are scattered; they are not grouped in compact villages. A *githaka* area with its inhabitants, including both right-holders and attached dependants, is called in Kikuyu *itura*, and is the smallest political unit. I translate this word 'village group'. A group of these was known in Kikuyu as *mwaki*, which may be translated 'neighbourhood', and for certain purposes, including the formation of age-regiments, a number of these combined in a wider unit for which there is no Kikuyu term.[1]

[1] For particulars of the populations of the tribal groups and their distribution see Middleton, J., *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa, East Central Africa, Part V) International African Institute, 1953.

4: Kenyatta I-5 (no date) 1953
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PREFACE

THE country of the Gikuyu,[1] whose system of tribal organization will be described in this book, is in the central part of Kenya. It is divided into five administrative districts: Kiambu, Fort Hall (Murang'a), Nyeri, Embu, and Meru. The population is approximately one million. Owing to the alienation of agricultural and pastoral land, about 110,000[2] Gikuyu live mostly as squatters on farms on European land in various districts of Kenya. The rest of the population inhabits the Gikuyu Reserve and the towns. The Gikuyu people are agriculturists; they herd large flocks of sheep and goats, and, to a less extent, cattle, since their social organization requires a constant supply of stock for such varied purposes as "marriage insurance," payments, sacrifices, meat feasts, magical rites, purification ceremonies, and as means of supplying clothing to the community.

[1] The usual European way of spelling this word is Kikuyu, which is incorrect; it should be Gikuyu, or in strict phonetic spelling Gekuyu. This form refers only to the country itself. A Gikuyu person is Mu-Gikuyu, plural, A-Gikuyu. But so as not to confuse our readers we have used the one form Gikuyu for all purposes.

[2] "We see no reason to doubt the general accuracy of the statement that the number of Kikuyu now resident outside the reserve is in the general neighbourhood of 110,000, and supporting calculations are given in the memorandum, which had been filed with the original record of the evidence." (*Report of the Kenya Land Commission*, September, 1933, § 459.)

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Identification

The Kikuyu (Kikiuyu, Gikuyu, Gikuyu, Wakikuyu) are a Bantu tribe of about 881,000 (1948), occupying 1,708 square miles. The Kikuyu include three subtribes--Gekii, Kenya, and Mumwea--and two closely related subtribes--the Gichugu and Ndia. The Northern Kikuyu are especially treated as the type. Linguistically the Kikuyu are closely related to the Kamba. Traditionally the Kikuyu entered their present country from the NE (?), wresting it (commonly by purchase) from the autochthonous Dorobo. Price (1950) reports the 1948 population as 1,116,000.

Basic Economy

Primarily agricultural, with important subsidiary animal husbandry. Manure is not used. The staple crop today is maize, but eleusine and "serious millets" were formerly the staples. Various beans, pigeon peas, legumes, peanuts, and sweet potatoes are also important, and some cassava, yams, arum lily (roots), and sugarcane are also grown. There are numerous goats and sheep and a moderate number of cattle. Goats and cows are milked, but butter and cheese are not made. Blood is drawn from the jugular veins of cattle with an arrow. Chickens are a source of subsistence. Honey is gathered. Fish and eggs are not eaten, and there is very little hunting. There is considerable internal trade, with markets every fourth day, and a fair amount of external trade, e.g., with the Masai.

Sex Division of Labor

Cattle are herded and milked exclusively by men and boys. Boys hunt. Women do the cooking, thin clear the land and gather honey. Women do the bulk of the agriculture, though men plant certain crops and usually assist the women in weeding and harvesting.

Property

Rights to tracts of land are originally acquired by clearing unoccupied land or by purchase from the autochthonous Dorobo. They belong collectively to the lineage descended from the first owner and to full and half brothers. Though administered by the senior member of the lineage, the land can be used equally by all members. An owning lineage may be a major lineage (mbari) or a

agnates thereof. Rights may be acquired (or lease taken) by purchase, and there are various forms of tenancy. Any person may graze his livestock on fallow or unclaimed land.

Inheritance is patrilineal and by males only. A man's land and livestock are distributed among the "houses" of his wives, within a "house" all sons inherit equally. In default of sons, a man's heir is his eldest surviving br. then Fath.

Social Stratification

The Kikuyu do not practice slavery, but there is a class of serfs or clients (ndungame), consisting of poor men who attach themselves to a richer person, for whom he performs work and services and from whom he may receive a wife. There are many wealth distinctions, especially between landowners and tenants. Differences in status also flow from the age-grade system.

Marriage

Marriage involves a substantial bride-price (as many as 80-100 goats) and a rite of mock capture. The bride-price is contributed by the groom's father and is paid in installments to the bride's mother. There is premarital sex freedom (but without pregnancies) among warriors and unmarried girls. Wife-lending between age mates.

Polygyny is preferred and fairly common, being practiced by all who can afford it. Secondary unions are preferential with FaBr; and ElBrW; but forbidden with FaBrW; and SoW;. The senior wife does not ceremony; others every Suffalo or Hoho. Each married woman has a separate hut.

Family

The typical residential unit is a polygynous family household--a cluster of huts surrounded by a hedge or enclosure. The sources mention "extended families," but these are really localized lineages. Only occasionally does a FaBr or So actively attach himself to a man's household.

Kin Groups and Descent

Patrilineal descent prevails.

There is mentioned bilateral extension of marriage taboos.

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There are nine agamous totemic peri-clls (mohiriga), divided into exogamous sub-clls, these being divided into peri-lineages (mbari) and sub-lineages. Marriage is forbidden into the mother's as well as the father's sub-cll. Lineages and sub-lineages are land-owning units.

Kinship Terminology

Fa--baba, atia. Mo--maimo, nyina. So--mwa. Da--mwari. Si--muruma, muthuri. Wi--mũka, mutumia. Bro"bũro." Sis "bũro."

Father's"big (or little) Fa." Mob--maima. FaSi, MoSi--tata. MoCh (m. s.)--mũdwa. BrCh(m. s.) called So or Da.

Cross-cousin terms are basically of Omaha type.

Settlement Pattern

The Kikuyu formerly lived in neighborhoods of dispersed polygynous-family homesteads, but in some regions they occupied palisaded villages. Compact villages prevail today. Dwellings are round with wattle-and-daub walls and conical thatched roofs. Each neighborhood or village has a bachelors' hut. Median community size just under 400.

Community Organization

Local organization is essentially that of a patrilocal clan-community--a localized lineage divided into sub-lineages living each on their own land. The community is geographically equated with a ridge. It is called a riiria and includes attached tenants and other dependents as well as lineage members and wives. Clitoridectomy is practiced on girls at 10-15, and circumcision on boys at 11-18, as part of initiation rites. Boys initiated in a given year form an annual age-set, whose members cooperate economically and exchange wives. After about 6 years as junior warriors, living in bachelor huts with premarital sex freedom, an age-set advances to the status of senior warriors. Its members still live in the bachelor huts, but leave one by one as they marry, becoming elders on the birth of their first child. Annual age-sets are grouped into generation-grades, at an important irũngu ceremony, held every 30-35 years (bridefeast). Five age-sets (every 30-40 years), the age-sets formed since the last ceremony succeed the preceding generation-grade as a unit and constitute the ruling grade until the next irũngu

ceremony. Perhaps generally, and certainly in the south, generation-grades are alternately Mwangi and Maina [moiety-like divisions]; a man regularly belongs to the generation-grade after that of his Fa, i.e., to the one of the same name as that of his GrFa. The political system is based on elders belonging to the ruling generation-grade. Those who attain the status of elders before their generation-grade takes over the government hold only "shallow grades" paralleling the actual grades of the ruling elders. Ruling elders fall into two categories--junior elders and senior elders--the former being entered on the birth of the first child and the latter on the initiation of the eldest child. Each group of elders has a council and is divided into several sub-grades [3 for senior elders], advancement being achieved by payment of a goat. Senior elders exercise political and judicial functions. When all of a man's children have been initiated, and all of his wives have passed the childbearing period, he advances from the grade of senior elder to that of priest, sitting on the council of high priests.

(According to Lambert, both circumcision and clitoridectomy are practiced.) An age-regiment forms every 13 years. Two such regiments, a "right-hand" and a "left-hand" one, constitute a generation grade or age-set, of which each local group normally has up to 9. There are considerable variations between districts; one, for example, has a new generation grade every 25 years. Lambert postulates an 8-generation cycle in the south and center, a 7-generation cycle in the N.

Local Government

Each community is governed by a council of ruling elders, which exercises legislative, judicial, and priestly functions. There is apparently no local headman, but each landholding lineage segment is headed by its eldest male member. The local community also has an inner council, usually with nine members, composed exclusively of senior elders and priests.

State

The Kikuyu lack true chiefs, though there are men prominent for their wealth, wisdom, medical power, military prowess, etc. There is no true political organization above the local level, although communities unite into districts temporarily and for

particular purposes. Initiation ceremonies and age-grade functions are apparently integrated on the district level.

Warfare

Inter-community warfare is not infrequently, and there was formerly almost constant warfare with the Masai and Kamba--primarily for prestige and cattle-stealing rather than for political conquest.

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